

FROM THE CELLAR... MICHAEL HALL WINES



YOU HAVE TO VISIT MICHAEL HALL WINES BECAUSE...

The entire experience,
including the hospitality
and the wines, are second
to none.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

November 16, 2018

We heard so many positive things about Michael Hall Wines, especially from people in the industry, we felt compelled to visit. Are we ever glad we did!

As soon as we set foot in the quaint, unpretentious cellar door, Michael Hall greeted us in a warm, friendly manner, ready to share his passion for wine and the fruits of his labour.



THE LAY OF THE LAND

The cellar door, an impeccably-preserved heritage barn in a former pioneer settlement, sits on the edge of Tanunda in the heart of the Barossa Valley. Although Michael Hall began producing wine in 2008, the building dates back to 1860. Despite a few modern touches, most notably a pale wood tasting stand and some sliding glass doors, the integrity of the building, the soul of the structure, remains very much intact.

Michael Hall, a self-professed “wine nerd” as we came to learn, hails from England. The numerous skills he developed during his former career as a jewelry valuation expert, including an uncanny attention to detail and a refined ability to discern subtleties and nuances, have obviously transferred to his winemaking. Michael’s associate, Phillip Lord, also from England, shares the same passion for wine, as well as a similar, relaxed demeanour.

The estate produces about 2,500 cases per year under two labels, Michael Hall and Sang de Pigeon. Whereas the former, the flagship line, includes wines produced from single vineyards, the latter, the second label, showcases wines made from specific regions.

The grapes, the heart and soul of all Michael Hall wines, are grown in Barossa Valley, Eden Valley, and Adelaide Hills. This trifecta allows for a range of varietals, soil types, climatic conditions, and, ultimately, wines.



The eponymous Michael Hall and the inside of the 1860 cellar door



The minimalist wine décor inside the cellar door.

WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHY

Simply put, Michael Hall strives to produce the best possible wines with the minimal amount of intervention. In practical terms, this translates into hand picking the berries, using wild yeasts, and barrel maturation, to name but a few.

He chooses to leave his wines unfiltered, so a good decant might be in order, especially for some of his aged wines, if you can manage to keep them that long.

Seasonal changes are embraced and celebrated, resulting in wines that vary from vintage to vintage. Many would agree this puts one's winemaking ability to the test, especially in years when the climactic conditions are less than optimal.

The owner and winemaker summarizes his approach in two words: "slow wine." This means his award-winning wines, like many things in life, cannot be rushed. They take time to create and evolve, with the results speaking for themselves.

ONE-ON-ONE WITH MICHAEL HALL, OWNER AND WINEMAKER, MICHAEL HALL WINES

Q: What is your ultimate favourite wine and why?

A: I love Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Burgundy, but my favourite has to be a 2002 Chevalier-Montrachet from Domaine Lefaive, one of the bottles Anne-Claude Lefaive [the late and great winemaker at the illustrious estate] gave me to take away after the vintage I helped produce.

Q: What is your most embarrassing wine moment?

A: While I was putting acid into a tank, shaking it out, the plastic bag fell in.

"Wine can be serious, and we're happy to be serious, but it should also be approachable and fun." – Michael Hall

Q: Tell us one thing about you or your winery that nobody else knows.

A: During my career in jewelry valuation, I looked at diamonds in great detail. I now look at wine in the same way. Although some details can be quite small to the naked eye, they can make a big difference.

THE TASTING...

We had the privilege of spending time with both Michael Hall and his amiable assistant, Phillip Lord, during an informative and interactive tasting. We particularly appreciated their warm, down-to-earth approach, as well as their comprehensive knowledge and passion for what they do.

We started with the 2016 Sang de Pigeon Blanc de Pigeon (price: \$30 AUD; 90% Chardonnay and 10% Sauvignon Blanc) and ended with the 2016 Mount Torrens Syrah (price: \$50 AUD).



Wine selection at Michael Hall.

In between, we tasted the:

- 2017 Piccadilly Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc (price: \$35 AUD)
- 2016 Greenock Roussanne (price: \$38 AUD)
- 2017 Chardonnay (price: \$50 AUD)
- 2017 Lenswood Pinot Noir (price: \$50 AUD)
- 2016 Sang de Pigeon Shiraz (price: \$30 AUD)
- 2015 Eden Valley, Flaxman's Valley Syrah (price: \$50 AUD)
- 2015 Triangle Block Stonewell Shiraz (price: \$50 AUD)

After plenty of deliberation, we settled on two favourites, which proved a lot more challenging than it sounds. The 2016 Sang de Pigeon, Blanc de Pigeon, a blend of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, offered an unexpected, yet intriguing nose comprised of bruised apple (similar to what one might smell in some sparkling whites), sandalwood, yeast, biscuit, and vermouth. On the palate, this full-bodied white blend offered high acidity, copious citrus notes, most notably lemon, lime, and white grapefruit, as well as Bartlett pears, honey, minerals, and slate. We particularly enjoyed the enduring citrus, pear, and mineral notes in the finish.

Of the reds, the 2015 Eden Valley, Flaxman's Valley Syrah stole the show. Made in a style reminiscent of some fine wines produced in the Côte Rôtie appellation of the northern Rhône Valley in France, this medium-to-full bodied red, with medium-high acidity and soft, inoffensive tannins, offered raspberries, violets, leather, and chocolate in the nose, a fantastic, complex bouquet. On the palate, we enjoyed more of the same, as well as sour red cherries, all of which combined in an elegant, balanced package. Sour red cherries, leather, and chocolate persisted in the rather long finish.

We particularly appreciated the different expressions of Shiraz/Syrah, which, in many ways, epitomized differences between New World and Old World styles, so to speak. Whereas the 2015 Triangle Block Stonewell Shiraz was made in a style more representative of the Barossa Valley (big, full-bodied, with concentrated flavours and tannins to match), the 2015 Eden Valley, Flaxman's Valley Syrah, as described above, offered a much more refined and delicate expression of the varietal.

FINAL NOTES

Of all the wineries we visited during our time in Coonawarra, McLaren Vale, Barossa Valley, and Clare Valley, Michael Hall Wines emerged as one of our favourites, which says a lot given some of the incredible places we toured. If you've never visited the estate, which shares a cellar door with [Rieslingfreak](#), another fantastic producer, you have to check it out.

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